



**NOAA, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE**

**Miami, Florida 33165**

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## **...June 21 to 27 is National Lightning Safety Awareness Week...**

### **...When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors...**

The week of June 21-27 has been designated by NOAA's National Weather Service as [Lightning Safety Awareness Week](#). Floridians are well aware of the dangers posed by lightning. Florida historically leads the nation in lightning strikes and deaths caused by lightning.

South Florida is no exception to the overall state trend. To date since 1959, 96 people have been killed by lightning in the three-county area of Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach. This is the greatest total number of lightning deaths of any three contiguous counties in the United States. The long term yearly averages for lightning casualties in the south Florida mainland are two deaths and nine injuries.

Already in 2009, there has been one south Florida death directly attributed to lightning. On June 8, a lawn maintenance worker was killed in Coral Springs when lightning struck him while seeking shelter under a tree from the rain.

Historically speaking, the months of June, July and August are the deadliest months from lightning strikes. This is due to the combination of south Florida's nearly daily summer thunderstorms and the plethora of outdoor activities held during this time in which children are out of school. Nevertheless, lightning is a threat year-round in south Florida, and every month except January has seen a lightning casualty. Statistics also show that persons 10 to 19 years or age are the most likely to be killed by lightning in Florida, with those in their 30s the second most likely group.

Sadly, the vast majority of lightning casualties could have been prevented had preventive actions been taken.

Perhaps the greatest lightning myth is that if it is not raining, lightning can't strike. Lightning has been known to strike up to 10 miles or more away from the main thunderstorm core, and frequently occurs within 5 miles of the thunderstorm core. This type of lightning is often referred to as "bolts from the blue", but actually originate from the sides of a nearby thunderstorm cloud and extend out horizontally from the cloud for a few miles before reaching the ground. At least three of the south Florida lightning-related deaths in 2007 were from lightning striking outside the rain area. Although many people believe this type of lightning is rare, it occurs in virtually every thunderstorm. The key to remaining safe from this type of lightning strike is to keep an eye to the sky and watch for darkening skies on the horizon along with distant rumbles of thunder. Don't just look overhead for signs of an approaching storm!

The main thing to remember regarding lightning safety is: go indoors! Begin outside is never safe during a thunderstorm! This includes park pavilions, picnic shelters and baseball dugouts which provide a false sense of safety since they are covered. Bodies of water and trees are also very dangerous places to be during a thunderstorm.

Although being inside a hard-topped metal vehicle is safer than being outside, it can also provides a false sense of safety and should never be a substitute for going indoors unless there is no completely enclosed building nearby. Vehicles are relatively safe providing that you are not in contact with the outside shell of the car. This means placing your arms and hands on your lap and away from the window and steering wheel. Convertible automobiles offer no protection from lightning.

Fully enclosed buildings are the safest places to be during a thunderstorm, but even here there are places to avoid. Stay away from open doors, windows, screened porches and open garages, stoves, metal pipes, sinks and plugged-in electrical devices. Stay out of the shower or bathtub and off the toilet. Do not use a corded telephone or computer. Unplug major appliances such as televisions and air conditioners. Lightning can enter the house through electrical, telephone and plumbing connections.

For boaters, a measure of last resort is to crouch down in the center of the boat away from the mast or other metal hardware. Rubber boots offer little protection. Swimming, wading, snorkeling and scuba diving are not safe activities during thunderstorms.

Persons struck by lightning receive a severe electrical shock and may be burned, however they carry no electrical charge and can be attended to safely. An unresponsive person can be revived by applying CPR. Other persons who appear only stunned may also need medical attention.

An important lightning safety tip to remember is the following:

When outdoors, keep an eye on the sky. Look for darkening clouds, flashes of lightning or increasing wind which may be signs of an approaching thunderstorm. Get to a safe shelter

immediately if you hear thunder. Remain in safe shelter for 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder. Do not be fooled by sunshine or blue sky.

Know the weather forecast before you head outdoors, especially if you are responsible for the safety of others. A portable NOAA All-Hazards Radio is a great way to monitor the latest forecasts and warnings while outdoors. National Weather Service products such as the Hazardous Weather Outlook and Surf Forecast describe the daily lightning danger in south Florida on a four-tiered scale ranging from none, to slight, to moderate to high. However, any thunderstorm can produce a lightning flash which can kill you and those nearby. Products such as the Short Term Forecast, Special Weather Statements and Severe Thunderstorm Warnings give information on potentially deadly lightning in your area. These products can be found on the Miami National Weather Service website at [www.weather.gov/miami](http://www.weather.gov/miami) or through NOAA All-Hazards Radio.

For further information go to the following web site: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/>